

## This Time

The scene looked familiar: people filled the streets; signs echoed the voices of the protestors; police officers struggled to guide the honking cars with flailing arms. The bright blue sky and scalding sun umbrellaed the square, the blossoming flowers trampled by the foot-traffic of thousands of people. It was hard to be angry on such a beautiful day, but the people were fed up. Their cries shook through the air, carrying all the way to the rooftops on which several figures stood, overseeing the scene below. A chant began to take hold, starting out as a quiet whisper but quickly turning into a thunderous roar. Still, the White House kept its doors closed, waving the American flag proudly, just as it had on a similar day seven years ago.

Victoria remembered being stuck in the crowd, searching for her parents as she wove in between elbows and legs and arms and hands. Her petite ten-year-old stature had been no match for the pillars of angry people engulfing her. She had been frustrated at the fiery mobs, confused about what was happening, and afraid she may never make it out of this sea of people alive. When she finally grasped her father's hand and found her mother's worried eyes, she felt safe, and everything around her melted away.

Her mom hadn't penciled in "protest" on the itinerary for their family trip to Washington, D.C. Bothered by this major inconvenience, Victoria was disappointed that the crowds had made them miss their museum tour. Instead, the family found themselves in a nearby diner. As she slurped her milkshake, Victoria's eyes landed on the TV in the corner.

"Protestors riot over the death of Miriam Carey, a black woman who was shot five times in the back..." the reporter commentated as grainy cameras displayed the packed streets. Victoria zoned out as the man on the screen continued to speak.

"Victoria. Victoria. Victoria!" Victoria snapped out of her stupor as she was instantly snapped back to the present. She realized her friend had been shaking her arm, trying to grab her attention.

She glanced at her watch. 8:29. Almost showtime.

Now seventeen, Victoria towered over many of the protestors beside her. But her height wasn't all that had changed. Although she had failed to comprehend the anger of the protestors when she was ten, she understood it now as she stood beside them to fight the same battle they had been fighting all those years ago. Newfound confidence in her beliefs and ideologies radiated from her skin, her energy bouncing off that of those around her. Standing underneath the mountainous White House, Victoria felt more powerful than she ever had.

She grabbed the microphone off its stand, gripping it firmly in her hand. She took a deep breath as she stepped forward and raised a single, closed fist.

This time, the people parted before her like the Red Sea. This time, every single face in the crowd turned up towards her, standing still and awaiting her command. This time, the elbows and legs and arms and hands unfolded without prompting to mirror her raised fist.

This time, Victoria understood the pain of her people. She understood the anger, the sadness, the confusion on the faces gazing up at her. This time, she would fight.